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The grand opening of the Nathaniel Winsor House as the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society's base of operations is scheduled for October.

Lingering discontent within historical society

By TOM BENSON
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DUXBURY

DUXBURY — It's only a half-mile trip along Washington Street, but moving the headquarters of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society has already taken nearly two years, cost about a million dollars and may be partly responsible for a still-festering rift between some of the society's members.

The grand opening of the Nathaniel Winsor House as the society's new base of operations is slated for early October, but some members of the organization remain frustrated about what they say was a closed series of decisions about the house.

This past winter, a group of society

members presented an alternative leadership slate for election, citing the lack of information given to members during discussions about the Winsor House, among other issues.

"It came directly from that whole business," Marcia Solberg said of the Members for an Open Society movement. "Decisions were being made by the then-leadership that were closed. A public slate was presented to try to open the society."

Society members wound up unanimously electing a slate of candidates

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Discontent within historical society lingers on

■ HOUSE

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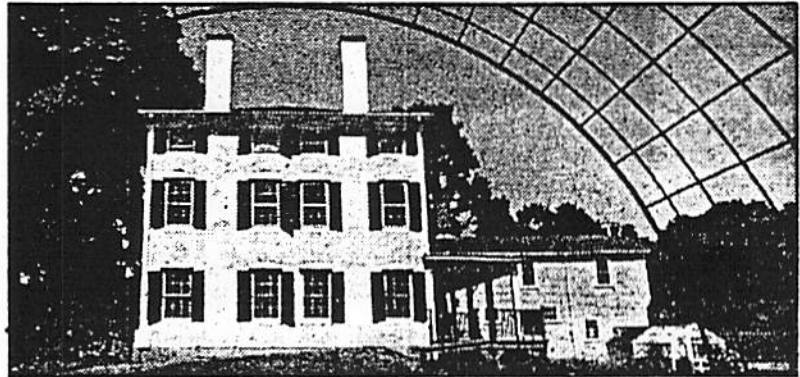
that had been jointly developed by the organization's outgoing executive committee and Members for an Open Society, but Solberg, former president and executive director of the group, said communication remains a problem.

"The new board is in place and some of the problems have not gone away," Solberg said. "We've seen some good things happening, but we still don't see that openness that we started for. The biggest concern is the fact that there isn't open communication. What's happening with the house is reflecting the problem."

Solberg was fired by the board in June 1998. Board members cited irreconcilable differences, while Solberg said she got into trouble for pushing the board to establish a usage plan for the Winsor House. As a past president, Solberg retains a seat on the society's executive board.

Several members of Members for an Open Society now hold leadership positions, and changes have been made, said new society President James Hartford.

"I think we're taking great strides toward fixing a lot of these things," Hartford said. "I'm pleased with the progress overall, and I think most of the board members are as well."



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The Winsor House was built in 1807 by a prominent shipbuilding family.

He said most non-profit organizations have closed meetings for the sake of efficiency.

"The board is elected to do the society's business," Hartford said.

The society has an annual open meeting every winter, but its regular meetings are of the group's executive board.

Although the Winsor House has been a symbol of discontent for some members, Hartford said the building has attracted greater interest from residents as it approaches completion, and that has helped increase society membership. He expects to have occupancy permits for the home within a week or two.

The stately home, built in 1807 by one of the town's most prominent shipbuilding families, was purchased by the historical society in December 1997 for \$680,000. The society decided to make the Winsor House its new headquarters, but the move was delayed when the group had trouble meeting handicapped-accessibility requirements and raising the money for renovations.

This summer, crews reworked the parking lot to create a space for a handicapped van and are building a ramp to the veranda of the house, according to society Director Patrick Browne.

"The main work that's gone on

over the course of the summer is construction work to make the first floor handicapped-accessible," Browne said. "It's going to house the headquarters for our office. The first floor is going to be used for meetings, exhibits and meetings of other organizations in town. The second floor will be offices."

Hartford said the society will have general occupancy permits for the first floor only, which also will house the reception area. The library and archives will remain at the Drew House, the current society headquarters, while a study of the properties owned by the society is conducted.

The study might uncover another possible home for the materials.

"There's no space in the first floor of the Winsor House that would lend itself to that," Hartford said.

The three-story yellow-brick house had been for sale for a few years when the society decided to buy it to make sure it would be preserved. A family also expressed interest in buying the house, but the historical group prevailed in a bidding war that drove the price to \$680,000.

Solberg, who was executive director of the society when the Winsor House was purchased, acknowledges that the house is a "fine example of Federal architecture" but said she said it does not provide the library and meeting space the society needs.